

Soul Care in the Ministry of Jesus (I)

GEORGE JOHNSTON

ABOUT twenty years ago Henry Cadbury published a book with the title, *The Peril of Modernizing Jesus*. Quite rightly he warned his readers not to make Jesus into a twentieth-century American or a British Tory or a socialist Russian. For Jesus was a Jew of Galilee who wore sandals and perhaps a white robe, who worked for some years in the building trade, whose entire outlook on life was determined mostly by the religion of the Old Testament, certain influences contemporary with himself, and also his own secret spiritual experiences. Jesus was born long before Galileo and Darwin, Einstein and Hoyle; he was ignorant of Freud's *id* and Adler's *inferiority complex* and the other discoveries of modern psychology. It will not do therefore to idealize Jesus as the eternal contemporary.

Cadbury admits, however, that one may go too far in this direction, and a recent volume by Sherman Johnson, *Jesus in His Homeland*, might well be consulted in order to redress the balance. Jesus was not just a conventional Jew of the first century. He was an outstanding personality, possessing his own genius, who was in certain respects a rebel. Therefore one should try to see in him also what belongs to him universally as "man" and not merely as "Jew." If one begins by dismissing him as old-fashioned and outdated, one will be compelled by the same procedure to debunk Plato, the Buddha, St. Augustine, St. Francis, John Wesley, or any other spiritual giant of the past. Genuine worth and wisdom will not begin in the thirtieth century nor in our own. Bishop Runestam has written that the criticism of Jesus as ignorant of modern psychology means that "He was confused in reference to what is in man," and it is "to recommend a salvation different from that of the Christian." The anthropology and psychology of the New Testament are, he asserts, "God's Law and God's Gospel," and so far as Christian soul care is concerned these must be of decisive importance. We must constantly keep in view what is the basic Christian concept of human nature, and especially "what Jesus Christ intends for man."¹ This is well said by an expert in his field, though perhaps it does not sufficiently recognize the real contribution that psychology has rendered and may still render to theology and to spiritual living.

No apology is required, then, for considering soul care in the ministry of Jesus with a view to learning from it for the pastoral ministry today. We believe in Jesus Christ as the Revealer of God, who created men for his own purpose of good; as the Saviour of sinners and their eternal Hope. In

1. *Psychoanalysis and Christianity*, pp. 177-179.

the Gospels we find that Jesus is presented under several titles, each significant for his supreme importance. He is the Son of God, the true messianic King of Israel, but also the only-begotten of God the Father. He is the Son of Man who was humiliated and shall be glorified. He is the eternal *Logos* or Word, the agent of creation, who became flesh to bring the grace and truth of God uniquely to earth. He is Lord, One who was raised from the dead; and he is Emmanuel, God with us.

These high theological descriptions never divorce his Person from the work he did and does for his disciples. As Son, he makes them members of God's family; as *Logos*, he states the meaning of God, the Judge and Rewarder of men, and the meaning of life. He is also man's representative, their High Priest, who was made like his brethren, knows their weaknesses, and was himself subject to temptation, sorrow, poverty, and at last death. Here then is a Jew who is not only by sheer miracle the *locus* of the divine Spirit in a human life, but also by equal miracle of personal identification a Friend and Elder Brother. How he did his work must have much to say to his ministers.

John 10 gives answer in the allegory of the Good Shepherd. The same title is employed in 1 Peter 2:25. "Shepherd," it should be noted, has a wider range of meaning in Biblical speech than the pastoral. To say that God is the Shepherd of Israel means that he is its sovereign, guide, and defender. Jesus as the shepherd has provided under-shepherds for the Flock of God (cf. Acts 20: 28f., 1 Peter 5:2) and has left them an example (John 13:15). He called and commissioned disciples even during the historic ministry, to share his work in its triple aspect: namely, to preach, to heal, and to forgive sins (Mark 3:14-19; 6:7-13; John 20:21-23).

First of all, then, *Jesus was a teaching preacher.*

It is no accident that this was so. The narrative of the great Temptations (Luke 4:1-13 and par.) suggests that Jesus had to consider the current conceptions of the Messiah's work and that he rejected them. He would not be a second Moses (cf. Acts 3: 22) who would feed bread (or manna) to the People of God in the wilderness; although we read that once, out of compassion, he did assemble them for a desert banquet and as a result they tried to force his hand and make him their king (John 6:15). He would not be another prophet-priest like Elijah, who would suddenly appear as the messenger of the covenant (Malachi 3:1) to take charge of the Temple and its liturgy; although we read that he did try to cleanse the Temple courts and as a result was quickly arrested and put to death. Nor would he be the new David (the Son of David) of popular acclaim who would win an empire mightier than Solomon's or that of Tiberius, for the price to be paid would be servile adoration of the Devil. Thus a religion of legalism, or one that is dependent on the sacrifice of goats and calves (cf. Hebs. 9:12-14), or one that takes the sword in order to conquer, is excluded; and Christ's ministers in their pastoral office too must beware of any methods that really belong to such forms of religion.

What then did Jesus choose to do in his own fulfilment of the messianic hope? He chose a "ministry," a "service"; and it began with teaching and preaching (Mark 1:14; 2:13; 6:6; 9:31).

Now the teacher in Judaism in the lifetime of Jesus was often a scribe, an adherent of the party of the Pharisees, whose method was to interpret the divine *Torah* or Law with the help of many "authorities." Or, like the "Right Teacher" of Qumran, he might provide interpretations of Old Testament prophecies that made them suit his own conditions. Jesus astonished the synagogue congregation at Capernaum because he had "authority," a word that probably indicates direct communion with God and an original mind.

Again, the true teacher, in the ancient world as in the modern, was one with patience to persevere with persons, and his message must be persuasive rather than "sophistical." Clearly, Jesus made immediate contact with most people, in the synagogue, on the hillside, at the lakeside where crowds used to besiege him. He also gave time to individuals. Mary, the sister of Martha, hung on his words. He spoke directly to Levi, to Zaccheus, and to others. Above all, he took the Twelve apart to be with him and be taught.

As teacher also Jesus was a story-teller whose parables sprang from the common life and betray a man who knew the daily life of the land. The parables "reveal a definite personal character, a unique clarity and simplicity, a matchless mastery of construction."² His stories compelled self-examination and teased out of people the answers to their own queries (cf. Luke 10:36). "Jesus would not, and could not, do their thinking for them. He could show them what to look at. He could paint them pictures in words and show them signs in action. But they alone could take the next step. They could see whether they were in the picture or still be waiting for an explanation."³

This teaching method justifies the conclusion that Jesus was gracious to men and women, keenly observed their motives and behaviour, and was prepared to be spent in helping them. That is to say, the teaching was not remote, it was his pastoral work in action. It required patience and hard work, but because he gave it both, he came to know what is in man (John 2:25). It enabled him to see inside Simon the Pharisee, the penitent publican, and Levi the tax collector (Luke 7:36ff., 18:9ff.; Mark 2:14).

When we turn to the content of the teaching, we see that it combined elements of praise and blame, hope and judgment; this Teacher was no sissy!

The good news (Mark 1:14f.; cf. Acts 10:36) was that God was triumphing over principalities and powers of evil (Mark 3:23ff.). Jews in that day, like people in our own time, were burdened with anxieties and doubts about basic issues; and particularly about such things as the Roman occupation, heavy taxes, sickness, and insanity. As a nation pledged to the

2. Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, p. 10.

3. T. Ralph Morton, *The Twelve Together*, p. 80.

covenant of Yahweh and separated from Gentile dogs and Samaritan half-breeds, they were under discipline, they knew the meaning of sin, of debts due to God, of moral uncleanness. In the desert of Judea men like the Qumran covenanters and John the Baptist summoned them to repentance and a new manner of life (cf. 1QH, the *Thanksgiving Poems*, 4:30f.; 6:9-13; 7:28-30). When Jesus came, he too talked about sin and repentance, divine grace and love, "came with the message of God's antecedent forgiveness,"⁴ as we read in Mark 2:9f., Luke 15, 18. The yoke Jesus offered was easy and his burden light (Matt. 11:30).

Yet there was another, disturbing note in his teaching, which people found hard to take, new wine that demanded new wineskins (Mark 2:22). The result was conflict over many aspects of religious duty (Mark 2:16; 3:6; 7:9-13; 11:27-33; 12:13-40). Of his own followers he required tolerance, humility and gentleness, and he said terrible words like these: "If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off . . ." (Mark 9:33-48). He called for self-denial and for courage in the face of persecution, because he knew full well the world in which selfish greed and ambition rule.

Those who would walk in his way as pastors must take into account the realism of Jesus as well as his tenderness. It is not enough to say with Calkins in his book, *Jesus and People*, that the Lord was gracious, sympathetic, and loving; or that he showed moral and spiritual power. It is not adequate to analyse his method as one marked by observation, a leisurely approach and detachment, attention to one problem at a time, and a belief in people. It was also, as Dr. Calkins does see, a demanding method; for it was urgent business that Jesus had undertaken. He came as God's servant in the crisis of all time, yet he failed at Nazareth and had to retreat from Galilee because people would not understand or insisted on a worldly and materialist Kingdom. Jesus had to face the depths of evil in the heart of man (Mark 7:21-23) and ultimately to accept rejection and crucifixion (Mark 8: 31-36). What is more, he called his disciples too to walk the road to the cross, so that Christianity came to conjoin happiness and despair, assurance and hope, pessimism about the bondslaves of pride and evil, optimism about the power of God to raise the dead and create new heavens and a new earth. Nevertheless, even if one rise from the dead, there are those who will not believe; even with the Old Testament completed in the New, they will not believe (cf. Luke 16: 31). Hence the pastor must watch and beware, for the End is not known (Mark 13:32), and the lessons of the past advise him that many are found wanting when the crises happen (Luke 13:1-5). Preachers who are teachers and pastors (and they must be both, to be worth their salt) have to do justice to the elements of grace and judgment in the Gospel account of Jesus, their example.

The preacher, of course, labours under the trial that he is himself subject to infirmity and sin and he must be ever ready to speak to his own condition.

4. S. E. Johnson, *Jesus in His Homeland*, p. 72.

But it is important to stress here the fact that regular preaching is an essential aspect of the cure of souls. The old Scots worthy who said to the young pulpiteers of his time, "Wherever you start in the Scriptures, make across country as quickly as possible to Jesus Christ," should have added this: "Make across country to the life of your own day and the actual needs of your own people." Isabel Cameron tells the story of Colin Chisholm who came long ago to Glen Annat in Scotland. "I have been in college for five years," he told Miss Rosemary Leigh, "and now I am come to teach and to preach." "And I do suppose they teach *everything* in the college, Mr. Colin Chisholm?" replied the young beauty, with mischief in her eyes.⁵ Before long the minister found that he must preach about witchcraft and evil doings by night in the parish; he had to teach the doctrine of election in such a way that it could never justify the hypocrisies of his ruling elder, Magnus MacLeod of Ravensrock. He had much to learn about women, and he had to take into the manse the forlorn and the sick. So is it in Canada today. Woe betide the preacher who says that he has no time for pastoral visiting, and who employs a retired man to be his substitute! Woe betide the minister who accepts the view of some Americans that his duty nowadays is to be the "director" of the parish team, as though he were a business manager with an important plant to run, executives to train, and a budget to raise! A preacher in the mode of Jesus must also be a pastor.

Thus he will bring comfort to the dispirited and good news of the mercy of God, two notes that George F. MacLeod has said he would emphasize, if he had his early ministry to do over again. He will also need to be outspoken, in charity and humility, but bravely like John Knox on the social and political issues of the day. For he is the servant of God and the servant of men.

His work will be done in a variety of ways: with individuals, with small groups, and in the great congregation. Preaching over the heads of the folk will have no pastoral relevance. Preaching may have poetry and a spice of humour in it, for the same reason. He must, of course, be free with men and women in such a way that he is accepted as a man of God and yet not repulsed because he lacks sympathy. It may have been unfair criticism, but it was devastating, that "what the Rev. Mr. A. needs is a public relations man to go ahead and meet people for him."

This leads to the point that ministers who are faithful must expect criticisms of many kinds, for they need not look for easy successes. The New Testament makes no pretence that principalities and powers of evil have closed up shop since Easter.

Finally, it may be stressed that the pastor who is preacher and teacher should be ready to speak with something of the same authority as Jesus himself. That is to say, he is not set amongst his flock to be merely a second-hand reporter or a retailer of old truths. He should be able to say with Job: "I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees thee"

5. *The Street of the Spinners*, p. 30.

(Job 42: 5; cf. John 9: 25; 1 John 1:1-3). There has to be a first-hand witness. At the same time, the pastor may have to teach in a situation where some individual needs reassurance, and it will hardly do for him to strike a wavering and uncertain note. He needs the wisdom that is sure of Jesus Christ but not dogmatic in the popular meaning of that word. Mysteries and problems remain, in spite of the Christian revelation. And yet the people who look up to the pulpit hope to be fed, not with theological arguments whereby the preacher is trying to convince himself or out-shout his antagonist, but rather with the devout faith and confidence of those who have seen the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Few are given the grace to be authentic prophets of the Word, but all may aspire to speak a prophetic word by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; else would Christian preaching be reduced to the level of the scribe and the pedantic exegete. It is by virtue of his call by Christ in his Church that the preaching pastor, seeking to walk in the steps of Jesus, should have words of authority to say to the congregation to help, assure, surprise, convict, inspire and teach.

(A second article will follow.)